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ABSTRACT

Scant research is available on the environmental constraints in the educational setting that inhibit women from obtaining high-level administrative positions, or on potentially effective change strategies. As part of a symposium defining research needs, this paper presents baseline data on the black woman administrator and analyzes the environmental, sociological, and psychological factors that relate both positively and negatively to individual success. The demographic data are a result of a survey of blacks who held administrative positions in large city school districts of 100,000 or more during the 1972-73 school year. From a total of 1,004 questionnaires returned, approximately 250 were from female administrators. The profile presented of the black female administrator includes personal characteristics, professional experience and academic preparation, self-concept, perception of unrest, and perception of the school district. A section discusses issues peculiar to the black woman. The discussion is limited to her double "negative" status, institutional manipulation, and self-perception. (Author/MLF)

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TRAINING AND HIRING OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS: CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE BLACK WOMAN

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A PROFILE

For years, minimal attention has been focused on the Black male administrator who has labored invisibly in the urban school systems. Even less concern has been directed toward the Black woman. Nobody knows her name. She is, for statisical purposes, invisible. The purpose of this section is to distinguish her in the crowd by providing baseline demographic data.

The demographic data are a result of a survey of Blacks who held administrative positions in large city school districts of 100,00 or more civilian population during the 1972-1973 school year. Ten states out of the fifty lacked cities of 100,000 (Delaware, Idaho, Maine, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wyoming, North Dakota, New Mexico, Vermont, Montana). Essential data were drawn from a study of national scope conducted by this writer. Data were collected from 1,004 returned responses to a survey questionnaire entitled, "The Study of the Black Administrator." Female respondents included approximately 250 assistant principals, principals, assistant superintendents, and supervisory administrative types. These administrators are unique individuals, but alike in many ways.

The profile that developed from this study examined the personal characteristics, professional experience and academic preparation, self imagery, perception of unrest and perception of the school district. Unfortunately, the central focus of the study was not on Black women; therefore, some of the data is not as generalizable to the Black female administrative population as one would like. The data does enable one to examine part of the texture of life of the Black woman administrator.

Sex and Position

For the most part, the Black woman is at the bottom of the administrative heap. Generally, white men hold the top positions such as principal or superintendent, then Black males, then white females and lastly, Black females. This educational caste system closely follows the societal organization. Black women, like white

Sex and Position - Cont'd.

women hold traditional positions in the executive suite such as assistant to, supervisor, consultant, elementary principal, and administrative assistant. The Black woman is able to obtain limited administrative positions. Until a few years ago, Black women were losing many of their modest gains because of the pressure and preference for non-white males. This writer found that the relative per cent of Black women promoted decreases after 1966. Of Black administrators promoted prior to 1966, women represent 29.3 per cent. After 1966, they represent only 24.3 per cent. Even though Blacks, as a group, face significant discrimination in the administrative arena, Black women face more.

In decreasing numbers, the Black woman can be found in the elementary principalship in a so-called tough, predominantly Black school. Rarely, can she be found in the high school principalship or the superintendency. The high school level is for all intents and purposes, exclusively male.

On the whole, she has spent more time in the classroom or handled non-administrative tasks longer.

Age and Position

The Black woman is usually older than the Black male administrator. Most Black women cluster in the middle forties to middle fifties before assuming the first administrative position. Unlike white males who begin their climb up the ladder before age thirty and Black males by age forty, most Black women make their entry somewhat later.

Studies for all administrators suggest that the older the person, the higher the position. The non-white administrator tends to have a lower position although older in age. Such is the case for most Black women.

Experience and Preparation

Black women have substantial experience and education. More than a few have spent long apprenticeships in the teaching ranks before the first administrative position. Mrs. F. taught twenty years in the same building before she was even considered for administrative leadership. She had informally directed building curriculum efforts for years, making reputations for several male principals. For her, having the proper credentials and competencies did not matter as much as being Black and female. The average years of teaching service for most Black administrators is ten. For Mrs. F., it was much longer.

The Black woman is well prepared. She has a strong background in curriculum development, instruction, or the education of exceptional children and holds the required administrative credentials. A majority of Black administrators received their undergraduate degrees before 1951 from predominantly Black institutions located in the South. At the time these women began their college careers, white schools were closed to them. Additionally well over 50 per cent possess master's degrees. A relatively small per cent hold terminal degrees.

Mobility

The Black woman has tended to be placebound living and working in middle to large urban school systems in the North. More than likely, she can be found living in a predominantly Black, middle class urban neighborhood. The limited mobility status of Black women may be changing since more and more realize that to climb the administrative ladder faster, or move up period, mobility helps. Although mobility may not guarantee success, many are willing to make the necessary sacrifices.

Self-Perceptions

Contrary to the pathological view taken of Blacks by some social scientists (Frazier, Moynihan), the majority of Black administrators have positive perceptions of

Self-Perceptions - Cont'd.

themselves and their ability to do the job (Doughty, 1974). They view themselves as leaders in their community and integral members of the administrative team. They tend to reject negative descriptions of themselves such as paper shufflers or highly visible tokens. They feel that they are hired and promoted because of their credentials and past performance.

As a group, Black administrators do not view unrest as a major factor in their promotion. In the study conducted by this author, more than 67 per cent responded in this manner. The evidence suggests that most of the administrators were promoted in the aftermath of disruptions. There appears to be inconsistencies between thought and the actual practice. These inconsistencies should not be misconstrued as negative perceptions but merely different human perceptions of a question. Based on this study and Ladner's, one should expect most Black administrators to have healthy, positive perceptions of themselves.

SOME CONSIDERATIONS

As universities train and school districts hire more women for higher level administrative positions, the Black woman in particular, must be aware of environmental, sociological and psychological factors that relate positively and negatively to her individual success. Much can be learned from the current literature dealing with sexism in the administrative market place, power relationships, assertiveness training and the like. Needed, however, is a frank discussion of issues peculiar to the Black woman if she is to scale that ice covered mountain successfully. Thus, the primary reason for this section.

Although there exists a plethora of considerations, the discussion is limited to her double "negative" status, institutional manipulation, and self-perception. These seem especially pertinent based on personal experience as an administrator, conversations with Black women administrators or aspirants across the country, and reading of the popular literature.

Double Negative Status

It is popular to believe that the Black woman has a corner on the employment market because she is satisfying two criterion -- sex and race. Supposedly, Black females are in great demand and short supply. Epstein (1972) has attempted to explain the success of the Black professional woman by looking at the positive effects of the multiple negative. Her study suggests that being a double negative might be facilitative in that the negatives cancel the effect of the other. Other data indicated that Black women suffer from this duality when their earning power is compared with Black men, white women, or white men. All sorts of opportunities are supposed to flow her way because of such scarcity. Of course, such perceptives are merely myths if one looks carefully at the positions Black women hold in educational administration. What one sees is based in part on where one looks or what one wants to believe.

Perhaps an important consideration for the Black woman administative aspirant or practicioner is to understand the double negative status and to realize the effects of such status, both negative and positive.

Do affirmative action mandates or conciliatory agreements realized with EEOC require that a minority be sought for a particular position or included on the list of applicants for the position? Certainly such situations would explain why a few Black women are always included on search lists of the "top ten." One friend recounted that she was so tired of being in the top 10 or 20 and never getting the job. She finally realized after completing several applications that many boards were merely fulfilling affirmative action requirements. In actuality, most boards screened Black female administrative applicants out but used the applications for the statistical records. Many aspirants are using only their first and middle initials to overcome this hassle.

A positive effect of the dual negative status is that some Black women will come through the screening phase because they fulfill two criteria. Some will have a better chance of making it to and through the interview phase based on this fact.

The Black woman administrator and the educational system must realize that the duality status will bring dissonance. Dissonance is defined as discord or lack of harmony. The status quo will not be the same. Disequilibrium will occur. Some colleagues, subordinates, or superordinates will respond negatively to reporting to and taking orders from a Black boss. Others will respond to the gender of the person, while still others will respond negatively to both. What one then has is a no win situation.

For example, a Black female in a midwestern city was appointed as the "first" assistant principal in a large urban high school. Her primary responsibilities were staff and curriculum development. As she proceeded to dig into her duties, she found that the opposition to the programs were not due to their content, but the inability of some teachers to have a Black woman telling them what to do. It may

have been easier if her sex was the only consideration but the race factor practically solidified the opposition. These teachers, mostly male, were not about to do anything this Black woman advocated. They did not take orders from their wives and were unaccustomed to Black leadership.

Black women may want to investigate closely when asked the typical question, "How will you handle such a situation?" For the important concern is really how the superintendent or board will perceive and handle the situation. Beware if the "victim" is blamed as having a personality deficiency. That may be a cover-up for the non-acceptance of the double negative status.

A positive component of the double negative status is that the clients of education -- students seem to respond favorably. Without much hard evidence, many of the administrators this writer knows develop excellent relationships with students. Perhaps this can be attributed, in part, to the positive characteristics Black women obtain through the Black family.

Hill (1972) suggests that characteristics that support the strengths of Black families are strong kinship bonds, strong work orientation, adaptability of family roles, strong achievement orientation and strong religious orientation. The strong kinship bond seems to be a key here. The Black female administrator more than likely manifests these characteristics because of the unique racial oppression experienced in this country and, thus, students identify with such persons. For the most part, Black females yet hold to the extended family concept in the school setting which may account for their positive relations with many students.

It is not easy to get board of education to consider women for top positions and even more unlikely to consider a Black woman. To successfully negotiate the management levels of the system, Black women need a coach, not just a mentor. It is particularly difficult for Black women to obtain needed coaching based on their dual status. They do not look like their superiors in color or sex. There are too few Black men and women who hold powerful positions. Those who do are busy

climbing themselves. Who then will show the Black woman the shortcuts, proper ways to get the attention of her superiors, or when to punt, pass or kick?

Institutional Manipulation

There are a multitude of covert manipulative tactics of which Black women must be aware as they enter the executive suite. These are uniquely racially based and eventually lead to conflict among Blacks within the educational institution. The old term for it is divide and conquer. Wilson (1974) maintains that Blacks often have less tolerance for other Blacks in conflictual situations than they have for whites. The Blacks are so angry with each other and so concerned about saving face that they are unaware of being manipulated like pawns in a chess game.

Male vs. Female

A classic case of manipulation is the Black male-female competitive battle. This type of conflict is often proliferated by the educational institution. As school districts increase the number of minorities in the administrative hierarchy, a Black woman is brought in and must compete with less or equally powerful Black males. Each seemingly is forced to vie for recognition and support. They are continually trying to top each other. Neither wins. Each destroys the other. A case in point is the testimony of a Black woman administrator in a large city system. As she attempted to assert herself, she was accused of domination and castration of the Black males because their egos were threatened by a woman. Such apprehensions were encouraged by the white male grapevine within the school district suggesting "she's taking over." The result was the isolation and alienation of the Black woman by her Black male colleagues.

Role Isolation

More often than not, the Black woman professionals will be scattered geographically or the only Black in a decision-making position in the central office system, having little or no communication with other Blacks.

Responsibilities of the role allow little contact with lower level Blacks. Alientation among Blacks can rapidly occur if no calculated effort is made to develop a communications network.

In an effort to reduce isolation, several Black women in Ohio developed an informal communications network. Monthly contact is made by phone, relevant reading material is shared by mail or those within driving distance have dinner to reduce the effects of isolation. With this support, the manipulative effects of isolation are decreased.

On a local basis, this writer has attempted to communicate formally with Blacks in all levels of the school district from telephone operator to cleaning personnel. We discuss issue that effect all Blacks regardless of status in the school district. It eliminates most of the animosity that enables manipulation. Who says that custodians and directors should not have lunch with each other? Some way or other, Black women must not buy the myth that only directors, assistant superintendents, or supervisors can communicate with each other. Our racialties are stronger bonds than professional roles or artificial titles.

Age, Immigrant, Degree Isolation

A typical manipulative tactic is to bring in a younger "outsider" with new ideas, toting a terminal degree, who directs older, established Blacks. The Black woman must realize that many of these Blacks have sat by the door patiently waiting for a chance that may never come because she is there. They know this and respond accordingly.

The Black woman should not be flattered by "you're different or better than so-and-so." While such a phrase may seem flattering, it is also manipulative. This writer was once told, "Rosie, you work harder than old Sarah." Sarah was told just the opposite. The tactic worked. We silently waged an unnecessary war. It stopped when we began communicating. The Black woman must identify immediately

such attempts to divide and conquer. If someone who "looks" like you is put down, you can rest assured that in your absence, the same will be said. Remember the Sunday school teachings and grandma's law. They are applicable in the administrative arena, too.

More and more immigrant or outsider status is used as a manipulative tactic. Anyone new to an environment of necessity proceeds slowly in order to get one's bearings. It may be suggested that the "immigrant" speak for the Black community at board meetings or executive cabinet meetings. Go slow on this one because many long time residents resent quietly, but vehemently, some outsider who knows nothing of the situation, speaking for them. Reduce the stigma first and even then speak only for yourself and not everyone else. Your brothers and sisters in the community will respect you more.

Perceptions of Self and Significant Others

A male friend, Preston Wilcox, always reminds me to never lose touch with my soul. In my opinion, this is perhaps the most important consideration for the Black woman. While Black women generally have a strong self perception, that perception is challenged daily in the administrative arena. Mrs. "Bee" once described it as being in a house of mirrors and getting a barage of grotesque pictures. Some are compact and squatty looking. Others are elongated. To many, you are the matriarch, the prostitutue, the iron maiden, the woman who wants to be like a man, the incompetent and the deviant all at the same time. None match with your own perception. If one's self perceptions are not intact, confidence in oneself can be shaken to the point of covert hostility and ineffectiveness. Only the Black woman can define who she is. No one else will or should do it for her.

Equally important is that the Black woman have significant others to whom she can turn. When this writer has had an extremely tough board meeting or just needs to talk to someone who understands, I check in with my "security" family. They provide a cup of tea, listeners and a warm bed. The next morning, I feel renewed and ready to try again. This outlet is essential for survival.

It helps, too, if one has a family who is supportive and can help sort out the real from the not-so real. Although this writer's husband is 125 mile away, we communicate during the non peak telephone rate hours. Many challenges are resolved within 10 minutes. Some are not. We have high phone bills.

The point that I have tried to make is that the Black woman can not do it alone. Significant others serve to stabilize positive perceptions and reduce the negative ones. Confidence in one's own ability to succeed with a little help from friends makes work life a little easier.

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